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# From Tithes to Seeds: Coinage of Seed Planting Doctrine in the New Christian Movements in Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the transformation of Christian giving from traditional tithing to the coinage of seed planting doctrine (SPD) within New Christian Movements (NCMs) in Kenya. The study employed a descriptive research survey design and used triangulation data collection methods: interviews, questionnaires, and observation. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from a sample of 386 participants and religious texts to capture prevailing attitudes, interpretations, and applications of giving within these movements. Anchored in Newman's Theory of Doctrinal Development, the study analysed how SPD evolved as a contextual innovation, emerging from traditional biblical interpretations and adapting to meet modern socio-economic and spiritual aspirations. Findings revealed that selected Scriptures are often reinterpreted to support the prosperity narrative, positioning giving as an act of faith that ensures divine reward. The study demonstrated that SPD, while grounded in Biblical Scriptures, reflects a dynamic theological development influenced by cultural, economic, and institutional factors unique to the Kenyan religious landscape. The research made a significant contribution to interdisciplinary fields of theology, religious studies, and the sociology of religion, with a particular emphasis on African Christianity, NCMs, and contextual theology. Further, it also intersects with biblical hermeneutics and cultural anthropology by examining the socio-economic implications of religious giving practices in local congregations. The findings underscore the pressing need for theological discernment and biblical literacy among both clergy and laity, offering insights relevant for faith leadership, theological education and ethical church governance in a rapidly changing religious landscape.

**Key words:** Giving, New Christian Movements, prosperity gospel, seed planting doctrine, tithes.



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### INTRODUCTION

Christian giving in Kenya has undergone a significant transformation over the past three decades, particularly within New Christian Movements (NCMs). One of the most notable shifts has been the move away from traditional tithing, that is, the giving of a tenth of one's income, towards the more flexible doctrine of "seed planting" (Mwongera et al., 2023). This new teaching, widely propagated in sermons and religious media, frames financial offerings as "seeds" that, when sown, attract divine multiplication of wealth (Bowler, 2013; Gifford, 2009). Beyond a mere change, this shift reflects a deeper theological and ideological re-orientation within segments of the Kenyan churches (Deacon & Oniango, 2020).

New Christian movements - comprising independent charismatic neo-Pentecostal churches that have grown rapidly since the 1990s – have been at the forefront of this transformation (Mwongera et al., 2023). These movements emphasise personal breakthroughs, financial prosperity, and spiritual empowerment, often aligning with the broader framework of the prosperity gospel (PG) (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Central to their theology is the belief that financial contributions as 'seeds' will yield tangible blessings such as wealth, health, and career advancement (Obadare, 2020; Marshall, 1998).

Despite the increasing influence of SPD, there remains limited scholarly exploration of its biblical foundations, doctrinal evolution, and contextual adaptation in Kenya. Traditional Christian teachings on giving, rooted in principles of stewardship and generosity, are increasingly being reinterpreted or even replaced by a transactional understanding of faith (Obadare, 2020; Marshall, 1998).

This shift has introduced a dynamic, yet controversial narrative around religious giving, raising theological, social, and ethical concerns. Critics argue that the SPD commodifies faith and exploits the economic vulnerabilities of believers, while proponents defend it as a Biblically grounded act of faith (Bowler, 2013; Gifford, 2009; Mwongera et al., 2023). Njoya (2003) also described the church as having become a marketplace where the word was sold to the highest bidder and the miracles priced according to the amount sown. He described the

practice of monetisation of worship through SPD as anti-ethical to the prophetic mission of the church. However, a gap persisted in the literature regarding the socio-religious transition from tithing to seed planting, the linguistic and theological coinage of the doctrine, and the motivations behind its adoption by NCM leaders and congregations. Thus, the study critically examined the doctrinal coinage of SPD by analysing the Scriptural foundations of religious giving in both the Old and New Testament, with particular attention to teachings on tithing and offerings. It further explored how these Biblical texts were interpreted, adapted, and repurposed within the context of NCMs in Kenya to formulate the SPD. The study also assessed how the doctrine has redefined religious giving and spiritual authority, highlighting its theological, cultural, and socio-economic implications in contemporary Kenyan Christianity.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Biblical Perspectives on Giving

The act of giving in the Christian church has a long historical background borrowed from the Jewish community and passed down to Christianity. According to Gbote and Kgatla (2014), there were three categories of giving practised by the Jews: free will, charitable, and mandatory forms of giving. The scholars identified free will offering in Genesis chapter 4, where Cain and Abel presented their produce to God. Their arguments are supported by Davidson (1993), who identified the story of Abel and Cain as the earliest example of giving in the Old Testament. This narrative illustrates acts of worship motivated by gratitude and thanksgiving for the blessings of agricultural prosperity, rather than a transactional expectation. In the broader OT context, charitable giving was directed towards the needy, the hungry, and orphans, and was characterised by selflessness, with no expectation of personal gain. This stands in stark contrast to SPD, which promoted giving, particularly offerings, with the expectation of receiving material or spiritual return, thereby reframing giving as a reciprocal or investment-based act.

The second category of giving in the Israelite community was mandatory giving, within which tithing was a central practice. As Legge (2003) has argued, there are four types of tithing based on

scriptural references. First, is the Lord's tithe also known as the Levites' tithe (Leviticus 27:30), which was designated to support the priestly ministry within the tabernacle and later, the temple. Second is the festive tithe (Deuteronomy 12:4-7) offered during annual celebrations as an expression of thanksgiving for the Lord's provision throughout the year. The third type was referred to as the tithe for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29), which was collected every third year and given to the Levites for the support of the poor, including orphans, widows and foreigners. Lastly, there was the temple tax or tithe (Nehemiah 10:32), which emerged later in Israel's history as a fixed contribution - a third of a Shekel for the upkeep and service of the house of God. These structured forms of giving highlight the communal and covenantal nature of Israelite worship, contrasting with later doctrines such as SPD that emphasise individual return on giving.

In addition, Israelites were supposed to give to God the first fruit offering out of love. This consisted of the harvest from the land and the firstborn male of the animals. Legge (2003) denotes that every form of giving was directed to the work of God, voluntarily and from the heart. In Exodus 36, the Israelites gave so much that Moses had to advise them not to bring any more. Throughout the OT, the Israelites kept the practice of giving as stipulated in the law. However, the modern church had deviated from historical practice and had replaced tithing with SPD. Thus, the study explored how SPD was coined and overemphasised in the ecclesiastical giving system. How its conceptualisation departed significantly from the historical tithing system had to be explored in the study.

Gbote and Kgatla (2014) identified fewer instances of giving as a legal requirement in the New Testament. Drawing from the teachings of Jesus and Saint Paul, they highlighted varying interpretations. They referenced Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where He condemned hypocritical giving that is merely for show (Matthew 6:1-4). Jesus advised givers to be discreet and to expect blessings from God. His opposition was not about the law of giving but the attitude of the givers. This is evident as He outsmarted the teachers of the law and the high priest's trick questions in Luke 20:20-26. When asked if taxes should be paid to Caesar, He replied,

"Give Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Luke 20:25). This response did not contradict the law but clarified the duplicity of the situation. Similarly, Saint Paul urged the Corinthian church to excel in the grace of giving like the Macedonian church, which, despite being poor, contributed generously and collected more than was needed. Saint Paul instructed the Corinthians to give generously within their means to assist others in need. According to Saint Paul, the giver was not supposed to be deprived by their generosity but to foster equality by uplifting the standards of the poor (2 Corinthians 8:1-15). He emphasised that the churches' donations were intended to support him and other missionaries in their work. However, within the NCMs, it became necessary to critically evaluate the coinage of the SPD. An in-depth examination was required to understand what motivated preachers to diverge from the original Biblical principle of giving, specifically, the practice of tithing as a means of supporting the work of God.

The proponents of SPD used the element of 'God's blessings as a reward for those who plant religious seed'. This became the basis for constructing the doctrine. However, various Scriptures in the Bible reveal God's intention of blessing humanity, which is dissimilar to the idea embodied in SPD. The interaction of God and man throughout biblical history shows the will of God to bless man. This is found in creation stories, in the life of Abraham and other patriarchs in Israel. The book of Genesis narrates the creation stories that reveal the nature of God, who is all-powerful, provider, and sustainer among others (Genesis 1 and 2). Through hard work coupled with ingenuity, human beings can use God's creation to get an abundant supply of their needs. This abundance is tantamount to wealth, as described by (Gichaga et. al., 2009 and Gichaga et. al., 2018). A further in-depth understanding of the Scriptures was significant to this study, as it allowed to unearth the correct information. The Genesis creation narrative, affirmed by Psalms 50:12, emphasises that everything in existence was created by God and ultimately belongs to Him. Human beings are made to be stewards of everything that God created. In the process, they are the beneficiaries of all the good things God has provided in the universe. This benefit is described as a blessing. And those who partake of continuous blessings are said to be prosperous.

Through this discussion, prosperity seems automatic, yet proponents of SPD used the premise of blessing to coin the doctrine.

Scriptural evidence highlights a clear disparity between Biblical principles of giving and the practices promoted by SPD today. According to Gbote & Kgatla (2014), giving began as a free-will offering before it was made mandatory in the Pentateuch. As a free-will giving, Gbote & Kgatla (2014) describe the story of Genesis, which was the first incident in the Bible to talk about giving. The two brothers, Abel and Cain, gave to God for the prosperity they received in farming and livestock. Their giving was out of a free will to appreciate and thank God for the provision. However, Abel's giving was accepted and Cain's rejected (Genesis 4: 3-5). The reason was that Abel carefully chose the fat portion of the animal, the firstborn, an indicator of keenness, careful planning with an honest and sincere heart. It was a sign that he revered God and that his heart was right with Him. On the other hand, Cain's attitude betrayed him because God looks at the attitude and the way one gives.

Although Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord, his offering was not received with favour and God muttered to him that "if you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:5). This indicated that God failed to accept Cain because He knew whatever he had done was not right. While trying to contextualise this story, Gbote & Kgatla (2014) suggest that the passage has biblical principles of giving applicable in the church today. They stress that giving is free will and according to one's ability. However, the passage does not support the claim that 'believers can earn God's blessings based on giving to the church, pastor, or the needy. Just like in this case of the two brothers, the seed givers ought to be aware of how a transcendent, all-knowing God works. The right attitude and motive are two virtues God expects from a believer, which are inclusive in the matters of giving. God searches the depths of human hearts, sees in secret, and acts accordingly, just like Davidson (1993) puts it. The proponents of SPD champion it, hoping that God will accept the believers' seed and that the seed will bear fruit in the form of abundant blessings if they embrace Abel's attitude. This narrative of SPD presents a distorted

image of God as a divine vendor who responds to human giving with guaranteed material returns. This theology undermines the sovereignty of God and reduces divine grace to a mechanistic formula (Bowler, 2013). The notion that giving "forces" God's hand into blessing believers directly contradicts the biblical depiction of God as sovereign and inscrutable (Romans 11:33-36). As Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) notes, such commodification of divine blessings presents a theological crisis, particularly in the African context, where economic precarity drives the vulnerable population to view giving as a spiritual investment scheme.

Mugambi (2004) critiques the growing trend of 'commodifying' religious experience in contemporary African Christianity. While he does not directly use the term "seed planting Doctrine," his analysis of the "commercialisation of religion" and the "manipulation of Scripture for gain" resonates directly with SPD practices. Mugambi (2004) warns against turning the church into a marketplace where blessings are auctioned through financial giving, arguing that such developments undermine the gospel's call to justice, equity, and service to the poor. He says, "What we are witnessing is not a spiritual revival but an economic enterprise dressed in religious garb." However, more than twenty years after he pointed out the unethical practices associated with DSP, it has continued to take deeper roots in the Christian churches in Kenya (Mwongera et al., 2023). The practice has become widespread, and preachers have devised numerous strategies to entrench it within church teachings and practices (Mwongera et al., 2023). Understanding how preachers developed and framed SPD as a replacement for tithing was a key focus of the study.

The Pentateuch presents giving as a divine mandate among the Israelites, rooted in the theological conviction that all possessions ultimately belong to God and must be returned to Him (Gichaga et al., 2008). Tithes, offerings, and other forms of giving were not voluntary acts of charity but covenantal obligations integral to the Israelites' worship and communal life. These contributions supported temple functions and personnel, including the priests, Levites, musicians, scribes, and prophets, signifying gratitude and obedience to God. A failure to give was perceived as disobedience, resulting in the

withdrawal of God's blessings and exposure to judgment. During Nehemiah's leadership following the Babylon exile, tithing had lapsed, prompting him to implement reforms that reinstated the practice (Nehemiah 10:32-39). The reforms were driven by the need to restore temple service and uphold the covenantal law of giving.

In the Kenyan church, which emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through missionary influence, the Biblical principles of giving and tithing were initially maintained (Nthamburi, 2000). However, in recent decades, the introduction and spread of SPD influenced by PG preachers such as Oral Roberts has gradually replaced traditional Biblical giving (Coleman, 2000). Unlike the covenantal and communal model outlined in the Pentateuch, SPD promoted giving as a transactional act: believers "sow seeds" expecting personal financial gain. This doctrinal shift represented a theological divergence from the Biblical framework of giving as a duty to God and a means of sustaining ministry. Although Coleman (2000) offers a historical insight into the emergence of SPD and PG in the American context between 1901 and 1950, there is limited scholarly analysis documenting how SPD was contextualised, developed, and popularised in the Kenyan church. Furthermore, there has been insufficient theological critique of the biblical texts frequently used to justify SPD, particularly on how they are interpreted to replace or redefine tithing. This gap necessitated an exploration of the scriptures commonly used in the coinage of SPD and a critical examination of their theological validity in the Kenyan ecclesial context.

### **Emerging Doctrines on Giving in the History of the Church**

The history of the Christian church has a record of the development of new doctrines, specifically in the line of giving. During the Middle Ages, the Christian church introduced payment of 'indulgences' pioneered by Pope Clement VI in 1343 (Renaud, 2022). By buying indulgences, an individual could reduce the length and severity of punishment that heaven would require as payment for their sins (Gerhard, 1991). They were encouraged to buy an indulgence for a loved one to prevent them from going to hell (Anderson, 1994). Anderson (1994) claims that by the early sixteenth century, Pope Teltzel coined a saying that "as soon as the copper

rings, the souls in purgatory spring." Many people purchased the indulgences, and the money raised was used to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome (Richard, 1999; John, 1985). However, the sixteenth-century reformers did not take the sale of indulgences lightly. Martin Luther, a German friar, was among the prominent reformers who opposed the practice. He described it as not only against the teachings of Jesus Christ but also against the idea of the church and the point of forgiveness and redemption (Lyndal, 2016).

While indulgences were eventually curbed through theological reform, SPD continues largely unchecked in Kenya due to a lack of documentation, accountability, and critical engagement not only in the ecclesiastical circles but also in the scholarly world. Thus, there was a pressing need to explore how and why SPD was coined and institutionalised in the NCMs in Kenya.

### **Seed Planting in the Modern Church**

The SPD in the modern church is taken to mean several things. It is another form of giving in the church, a replacement of tithing (Harral, 1985), a blessing accelerator (Carter, 2017), a favour attractor (Mwikamba & Akaranga, 2015), a protector (Gbote & Kgatla, 2014), and a door opener (Koch, 2009). It is a doctrine that has raised many questions, like why it is rampant in NCMs and if it has scriptural evidence. Its efficacy has been questioned, especially after wrangles were reported due to failed expectations after planting a 'seed' (Mwongera et al., 2023). In prior discussions, scholars argue that the doctrine was invented by NCMs practising the prosperity doctrine. The scholars' arguments have not explained the compatibility of this new doctrine with Christians' normal form of giving. Some have criticised it and given it derogatory names like greed on the pulpit (Ehioghae & Olanrewaju, 2015), quasi magic (Lioy, 2007), and quid pro quo spiritualised transaction (Akoko, 2007). This has raised the question as to whether the doctrinal construct is in conflict or harmony with the Christian style of giving. In this respect, the researcher endeavoured to gather the available literature and presented it in two ways: first, how the doctrine differs from the normal way of giving in church and secondly, Christian church views concerning the doctrine.

According to Koch (2009) and Akoko (2007), the SPD preached in NCMs has a pragmatic and utilitarian connotation. They argue that the doctrine is considered a principle for prosperity and a life of abundance. When believers obey and take action of faith to plant a seed, they automatically qualify for a supernatural blessing (Akoko, 2007). The action of planting the 'seed' qualifies as a quid pro quo spiritualised transaction. Whereas in the Christian church, giving is an act of gratitude where one gives to express appreciation to God, the giver (Koch, 2009). The orthodox perspective about church giving shows Christians gave back to God because everything they had belongs to Him. They did not give to receive anything back; but gave because everything belongs to God (Koch, 2009). However, Deuteronomy chapter 28 and Malachi chapter 3 explain the repercussions of failing to give to God as one is required to. A person would be cursed, incur losses, have poor health, barrenness and lack and vice versa. In essence, the Bible emphasises the need to give. The offerings given in the temple as it were in the Jewish tradition were supposed to support the work of God, pay temple musicians, Levites, scribes, cater for the upkeep of the priest in the temple and also be used in construction and maintenance of temple building (Gichaga, et. al., 2008). Today, church offerings are meant to do similar work. However, the utility value for SPD in the church in Kenya and the theological perspective of its coinage are gaps left out by Akoko (2007) and Koch (2009) that this study had to fill.

In Kasera's (2012) research on the 'biblical and theological examination of prosperity theology and its impact on the poor in Namibia', he concludes his thesis by negating PG's ideas such as planting of seed, positive confession and unbiblical faith as faulty hermeneutics, preying on the destitute and unethical conduct (Lioy, 2007). He further describes its teachings as unrealistic and simplistic, quasi-magical methods devoid of efficacy. Though a lot of pejorative sentiments have been used, this kind of description is prevalent among several researchers' work (Bowler, 2009; Koch, 2009; Kwateng-Yeboah, 2016; Lioy, 2007). But considering the influence of PG being experienced today and its advocacy of SPD as illustrated by Mwongera et al. (2023), the motivation behind its coinage had to be explored. Kasera's (2012) work shallowly mentions SPD but

does not show how it was coined. He generalised it as a normal form of giving in the church, yet this is a new doctrine with distinct characteristics.

According to Ehioghae & Olanrewaju (2015), SPD is a form of greed being practised on the pulpit. He argues that believers' spirituality cannot be measured through forms of giving. They therefore describe it as greed on the pulpit and would spread like cancer in the house of God. Ehioghae & Olanrewaju (2015) castigate the doctrine due to the narrative that the believers who accept to plant a seed are seen to have more faith in God than others who do not. Thus, Allen's (2013) work on the science of generosity was pertinent to the research. Through his work, the purpose of giving was exemplified, and the coinage of SPD was disfavored.

Allen (2013) defined 'generosity' as "the virtue of giving things to others freely and abundantly". The term, term, in a broad sense, means helping others as well as corporate giving, which Allen (2013) defines as an "act of one person paying a cost for another to receive a benefit". According to Allen (2013), generosity is both psychological and biological. Naturally, humans are born with the hardware required for generosity. The human brain has circuits and hormone systems in place that make people help others and feel good while doing so.

On the other hand, generosity is psychological in that the instincts to help others are innate and not purely the product of social and cultural conditioning. These two factors strongly informed the study. Allen (2013) delved into discussing general helping behaviour but failed to cover corporate generosity, which directly relates to the reasons behind coining SPD. However, the tenets of the significance of generosity discussed inform why people generously plant seeds in church. Allen (2013) argued that generosity promotes good health and reduces the mortality rate. It also reduces psychological problems, improving an individual's well-being. From this premise, it is clear why members in NCMs tirelessly 'plant seeds' among other forms of giving in the church. They have conviction, and this gives them the joy of planting a religious seed in the church in Kenya. However, the study had to explore how the doctrine was constructed.

The late Rev. Dr. John Gatu, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, was among the early Kenyan voices to challenge manipulation of theologies. Gatu (2006) exclaimed, "When giving is made a condition for receiving God's favour, we have corrupted the gospel." Thus, he warned against spiritualising economic transactions, emphasising that giving in Scripture is voluntary and rooted in gratitude, not a divine obligation with promised returns. His views directly challenge SPD's narrative that links giving with material blessings. With similar views, Gathogo (2011) asserted that "The seed-faith formula...is rooted in Western capitalism and finds fertile ground in African economic anxiety, but it is not congruent with the biblical theology of stewardship." His statement provided incisive theological reflection on SPD within the Kenyan context. He argues that these doctrines emerge from socio-economic desperation and theological shallowness. Gathogo criticises the "gospel of instant miracles" and warns that doctrines like SPD promote ecclesiastical consumerism while eroding community ethics and accountability. Despite the rich scholarly theological articulation of the SPD by Gathogo (2011) and Gatu (2006), their works did not clarify how the preachers framed the doctrine, yet it seemed to have already taken form in Kenyan Churches, and this needed documentation.

From a missiological perspective, Simiyu (2017) acknowledged that while the SPD offers hope to the economically marginalised, it also risks distorting the gospel message. He asserted that "SPD promises financial deliverance but often delivers spiritual disillusionment." He observed that many Kenyan churches had shifted focus from mission to fundraising through 'seed planting services.' Hermeneutical errors and textual misinterpretations used in presenting DSP distorted the gospel message. Key passages such as Luke 6:38 ("Give, and it will be given to you...") and 2 Corinthians 9:6 ("Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly...") are regularly quoted to validate the doctrine, yet the texts refer to generosity rooted in grace, motivated by love and not expecting anything in return (Wright, 2006). The aspect of helping the needy with the proceeds from giving in the church was lacking as espoused by Mwangera et al. (2023) when they exposed that much of the financial contribution were redirected towards enriching church leaders, funding

extravagant church projects or sustaining prosperity-driven media campaigns rather than addressing the needs of the poor congregants. This prompted the study to investigate why SPD was framed and institutionalised, particularly in Kenya, as a spiritualised mechanism for wealth acquisition despite its apparent neglect of the Biblical mandate to care for the needy.

### METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to explore the shift from tithing to SPD across Christian denominations in Kenya. The design enabled systematic collection and analysis of data on beliefs, practices, and theological interpretation from a large population. The target population consisted of clergy, lay leaders, and church members drawn from four purposively selected major denominational categories in Kenya, which enabled the study to capture expressions of Christianity. These denominations were mainline churches, African Independent churches, Pentecostal churches, and NCMs. Their selection ensured representation of both historic and emerging church movements. A multistage sampling technique was used. First, churches within each denominational category were purposively identified across different regions of Kenya to ensure geographical and cultural diversity. Within these churches, stratified sampling was employed to classify potential respondents into three strata: the clergy, lay leaders, and church members. Subsequently, simple random sampling was used within each stratum to select individual participants. The final sample comprised 386 respondents, proportionally distributed across the denominational categories: mainline churches - 102 participants; African Independent churches - 94 participants; Pentecostal churches - 98 participants; and NCMs - 92 participants. Data collection employed a triangulated approach to enhance the richness and credibility of the findings. This included semi-structured interviews with 10 clergy and 12 lay leaders, which offered qualitative insights into leadership practices and the theological framing of SPD. In addition, questionnaires were administered to 364 church members to capture congregational perceptions and experiences related to the practice of SP as a form of spiritual and financial exchange. Observation of church services and giving rituals, especially those centred on SP, provided contextual

understanding of how the concept of seed is mobilised within different church denominations, with a particular focus on its symbolic and material implications in NCMs. Qualitative data from questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarise and compare responses across denominations and respondent categories. For clarity and interpretability, the results were presented using tables and charts. Qualitative data from interviews and observation were analysed through thematic analysis. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and open coding was applied to identify recurring concepts. Codes were then grouped into categories and broader themes using a content comparison method. These themes were presented through narrative summaries and thematic groupings, highlighting theological patterns and contextual meanings of SPD across denominations.

### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

#### The Coinage of the Doctrine of Seed Planting

The word 'Coinage' in the study refers to the technique used to develop or introduce something new. It is the process through which the SPD was invented and constructed within the church context. Other terms with similar connotation include "framing, constructing, inventing, creating, or formulating." The study sought to trace how SPD was coined from Scriptures and elevated above the traditional forms of giving, particularly tithing. It revealed that SPD presented a theological neologism, coined and popularised in NCMs, to frame financial giving as a transactional act that guaranteed divine blessing, thereby reshaping traditional biblical teaching on generosity and stewardship practised in tithing. As unveiled through the study, the basic Christian teachings are undoubtedly derived from the Holy Book, the Bible. However, in the process of interpreting different Scriptures, preachers came up with SPD. The study analysed data from respondents on the emergence of SPD and presents discussions on how tithing camouflages to become SPD in the modern church.

The researcher interviewed the clergy and the church lay leaders from the mainline churches, African Independent Churches (AICs), Pentecostal churches,

and NCMs. It was established that respondents from mainline churches, African Independent Churches (AICs), and Pentecostal churches had relatively little knowledge about the coinage of the term as compared to those from NCMs. This was confirmed by the respondents' rating of their awareness about SPD. The results recorded showed that the majority of the respondents from mainline churches, 14.01%, AICs, 10.71%, and Pentecostal churches, 9.34%), rated average in awareness. In the NCMs, the rating was 15.11%, which was above average and the highest rating. However, though NCMs were above average, the other three denominations: the mainline churches, PCs, and AICs, were average, which means they also had a significant contribution. The respondents from these denominations were able to enrich the study with the knowledge of how SPD was coined. Tracing its departure from giving in the Bible to SPD in NCMs in Kenya.

Mutembei (O.I. 2022) observed that the concept of giving is as old as the history of the Bible, a concept shared by Gbote and Kgatla (2014). They cited the earliest Biblical story of giving that involved Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). According to Mutembei (O.I. 2022), the story is given at a time when categories of giving were not yet classified as we will find in the Scriptures following the Genesis story. That is why the general word "giving" was used. However, Gbote and Kgatla (2014) describe it as free will giving to denote the attitude Cain and Abel had, although in this study, the argument in contention was the possibility of SPD being a free will offering. They explored the Scripture and came up with the main elements describing its main qualities. They posit that Cain and Abel's giving had elements of careful choice, a willing spirit, a thanksgiving attitude, and the choice was in accordance with what one owned. As a theologian, though not differing with Gbote and Kgatla (2014), Mutembei (O.I. 2022) explains that Cain and Abel gave because they were blessed, not because they hoped for blessings as found in the SPD.

Mwangi (O.I. 2023), an ACK Archdeacon, differed with Gbote and Kgatla (2014) and Mutembei (O.I. 2022) on the issue of the 'first giving' concept in the Bible. She elaborated Genesis chapter 2 and believed that the first giving came from God, who gave Adam a wife, Eve, the Garden of Eden to live in, food, and

clothing. According to Mwangi (O.I. 2023), the history of giving in the Bible began with God Himself. In her further discussion, she argued that;

The initial giving by man, as demonstrated by Cain and Abel, was neither a command nor an obligation. The two brothers realised how much they had received from God and decided to give back. Another incident in Genesis 8:20 records the story of Noah giving burnt offerings after his life and the lives of his family members were saved from the waging floods that filled the earth, killing all living things, plants, and animals. Also, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, on several occasions, gave burnt offerings to God, not as a command (O.I.).

The first demand, which was also a command from God, began with Abraham when he was commanded to give his only son as a burnt offering at Mount Horeb (the Mountain of God). The obligation of giving was then inaugurated at the foot of Mount Sinai, which is the same Mount Horeb where God and Abraham met.

In her lengthy discourse on giving, Mwangi (O.I. 2023) espoused the giving history in the Bible that she claimed got into shape and was streamlined through Moses, who wrote the 632 by-laws that governed the lives of the Israelite community. Among the by-laws were the requirements of different forms of giving that were well stipulated in the book of Leviticus and were adopted and practised throughout the life of the Israelites in the Bible and beyond, and include some giving practices in the church today.

The Bible had over 2000 verses that spoke about giving (Garret, 2014). Garret (2014) and Rodriguez (2020) categorise the basic forms of giving in the Book of Leviticus, Chapters 1 to 5, as the earliest legalised forms of giving in the Bible. The five main initial categories include;

i) Burnt offerings, which are also known as *Olah* in the Hebrew language. Leviticus 1:3-17 defines the burnt offerings. It was supposed to be an animal; a bull, a sheep, a goat, a dove or a pigeon without blemish. The purpose of sacrificial giving was to show devotion to God and the 'General atonement of sin'.

ii) Grain offering, also known as *minchah* in Hebrew, is illustrated in Leviticus Chapter 2, which involved offering of bread that is unleavened in recognition of goodness and providence. A portion of the offering was given to the priest, while everything else was burnt.

iii) The Peace offering, also known as *Shelem* or *Shalem*, that is recorded in Leviticus Chapter 3, involved the offering of an animal without defect or grain meal. This offering was shared among two or more members of the community as an act of fellowship and a gesture of wishing one another prosperity.

iv) Sin offering or *Chattath* or *Hattat* in Hebrew is found in Leviticus chapter 4, which is also described as 'atonement offering'. The offering involved both burnt and peace offerings and was for the purification and atonement of an individual for an unintentional sin.

v) A guilt offering or *Asham*, also known as a 'reparation, or 'trespass' offering, is recorded in Leviticus 5 and was meant for the payment of debts owed on account of sin. It was paid in the form of silver, where 20 percent of the amount was given to the priest.

According to Mwangi (O.I. 2023), God initiated the giving of offerings to maintain a good relationship with the Israelites because He knew how weak they were as human beings, as evidenced in Genesis 8:21b, which says that "Every inclination of the heart of man is evil since childhood". They could not maintain their purity adequately before a holy and righteous God. That is why God gave them a system with a formula that involved regular offerings to enable them to retain their relationship with Him. She further elucidated the significance of maintaining a good relationship with God. She said:

God is a God with a plan. In Jeremiah 29:11, He has good plans with his people to prosper them and give them hope and a future. Those who walked with God in obedience would be blessed. The new doctrines on giving lack anything new that the recorded biblical examples provide.

Ndaiga (O.I. 2022) responded to the question on giving in the Bible. He praised the Israelites' consistency in upholding their religious practice of giving and handing it over to generations. However,

Ndaiga (O.I. 2022) argued that time and again, some challenges hindered the Israelites from meeting their religious expectations. This is because the practice of the usual offering among the Israelites was not static throughout history. Upon settlement in Canaan, their lives changed from being nomads to becoming agriculturalists who had to adopt a settled life. Their population increased, and political life changed from having Theocratic leadership (leadership by God) to adopting the Canaanite kingship system. The Ark of the Covenant had to be sheltered in a temple that was built during the time of King Solomon, who reigned between 970 and 930 BCE (Gichaga et. al. 2018). In the temple, there were musicians, Levites, priests, and other religious leaders who needed material support. Sometimes, the resources channelled to the temple were not enough to support all the religious leaders. However, the Israelites' Giving and offering system was not changed. Even when they went into exile in Babylon from 597 to 348 BCE, they remembered and implored each other to observe their religious rites among them, giving (Gichaga, et. al., 2008).

Nthamburi (2000) observed that the African church had been consistent in her giving routine, particularly tithing, for many years. In the 1990s, the African church experienced an upsurge of PG that influenced Christian spirituality and brought many changes. From this period, as alluded to by Mugambi (2009), preachers would preach and claim that the Holy Spirit had spoken to them, including in matters of giving, and people would be asked to give extra monies that were unplanned. This was different from the usual normal giving, basically from how it was known: People giving offerings and tithes in a service session. The continued emphasis by preachers that they were being led by the Holy Spirit laid the foundation for the preaching of PG, which eventually became the foundation of SPD. Accordingly, various responses regarding the perception of SPD were collated and discussed under four thematic areas.

The first statement discussed stated that SPD was revealed by the Holy Spirit to preachers who had the gift of discernment and wisdom to know the will of God concerning giving. 4 (66.67%) out of six interviewees agreed with the statement. This confirmed Harral's (1985) assertion that the

American preacher Oral Roberts had received a revelation that God replaced tithing with seed planting (SP). As espoused by other scholars, the Kenyan preachers who were mentored by Roberts began preaching in the early 1990s and claimed that the Holy Spirit was using them (Mwongera et al., 2023). When the respondents agree with this statement, it is not a surprise because NCMs like the Pentecostal churches where they originated extensively believed in the working of the Holy Spirit whom they believed indwells in them (Ephesians 3:16b) as opposed to the Spirit in the OT who was hovering over the earth (Genesis 1:2). In the OT, the Holy Spirit was given to individuals for certain assignments on temporal basis. It is understood to be "the Divine power, impermanent in human history... it is immanent only because it is essentially transcendent coming forth out of the supernatural life of God who deals directly with men" (Tyson, 1999). But in the NT, it is individually given to all who believe in Jesus Christ and dwells in them forever (John 14:11, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22). The Holy Spirit confers special gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-14) to the churches for use in the service of God (Tyson, 1999). It is from this premise that preachers claimed DSP was revealed to them.

According to Gitonga (O.I. 2022), Oundo ( O.I. 2022), and Rivono (O.I. 2022), the promise of Jesus to His disciples that was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost works in the church immensely even today. They argued that upon infilling by the power of the Holy Spirit, God, by His Grace, gives different gifts out of the nine that are recorded in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. All these gifts are believed to manifest in the church even today. However, in Pentecostalism, the most elevated gifts were Glossolalia (speaking in tongues), healing and miracles (Gifford, 2006), but the NCMs elevate wisdom, faith and a discerning spirit. With faith, one gains wisdom and discernment because faith in Jesus enables believers to be like Him. The respondents explained that their preachers, whom they believed possessed God's wisdom, had discerned that God's will for them is prosperity (*evimero* in Greek and *chelev* in Hebrew). This is backed by such Scriptures as;

i) 3 John 1:2, which says that, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers".

ii) Proverbs 28:25b, which denotes that “But he who trusts in the Lord will prosper”

iii) Deuteronomy 29:9 emphasises that, "So keep the words of this covenant... that you may prosper in all that you do".

iv) Deuteronomy 30:9 shows that God rejoices over the prosperity of His people:

Then the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly, in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and the offspring of your cattle, and in the produce of your ground, for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, just as he rejoiced over your fathers.

Many of the respondents (67%) were convinced that the preachers used wisdom to implore their congregations to practice SP. However, 2 (33%) of the respondents (Kinoti, O.I., 2022 and Thurania O.I., 2022) who disagreed with the statement believed that the preachers were not sincere about their claim to be using the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They were philosophical about the whole idea and wondered how one would tell whether it was true that the preachers were led by the Spirit of God. They were also critical about the ability of preachers to discern, while the members depended on them. Kinoti (O.I. 2022) asked whether ‘upon receiving the Holy Spirit, the members could not be gifted like their preachers’. He argued that the society had been invaded by people using other powers, including magic and sorcery. However, Mbugua (O.I. 2022), who supported the statement, did not doubt that the SPD preachers possess a lot of wisdom. He said, “For SPD to begin and become a centre of interest in the world of scholars, in politics and the general ecclesiastical sphere, there must have been a good reason, among them being well articulated and designed through wisdom.

The second statement was that the preachers in NCMs emulated Jesus’ method of teaching, in which He used imageries to liken religious action to agrarian concepts. This was proposed by Thurania (O.I. 2022), Oundo (O.I. 2022) and Rivono (O.I. 2022). According to Thurania (O.I. 2022), the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-23 and Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15) was used in support of the statement. He claimed the seed in the allegory that fell in the fertile soil and bore fruits was a relevant imagery to show the seed money in the church would

also reproduce (Matthew 13:23). This confirmed Magambo (2016) claim that SP was a master key to unlock believers door of blessings because a seed planted in church, a fertile soil is harvested in multiplication. However, Kinoti (O.I. 2022), Mbugua (O.I. 2022), and Gitonga (O.I. 2022) were of the contrary opinion. They argued in support of correct Scripture interpretation. Kinoti (O.I. 2022) elucidated that the parables were meant to explain the Kingdom of God. The parable of the sower was meant to expound on how people receive the 'word' of God and not 'giving'. Thus, Kinoti (O.I. 2022), Mbugua (O.I. 2022), and Gitonga (O.I. 2022) disputed the statement as being wrongly applied to coin SPD.

The third statement was about the reason for coining SPD. Kinoti (O.I. 2022), Mbugua (O.I. 2022), Gitonga (O.I. 2022), Thurania (O.I. 2022); Oundo (O.I. 2022 and Rivono (O.I. 2022) were in agreement that SPD was coined to serve as a strategy used to raise money in the church. According to Gichaga et al (2008), the Temple in Jerusalem was depleted of its resources as a result of the Israelites' failure to fulfil their obligations to give their resources. This made Nehemiah carry out religious reforms on the temple Levites and the priesthood, as well as the regulation of the tithing system in the temple. This study confirmed that in NCMs, there was a challenge in resource mobilisation techniques. This led pastors to ‘Coin’ SPD to cause members to give. Kinoti (O.I. 2022) critiqued the needs in the church that would propel the inventing SPD. He claimed that the failure to have robust monitoring and evaluation of church activities made it difficult to conclusively determine their intention. He negated the idea of needs and affirmed that the clergy had hidden motives behind the coinage of SPD, among them being self-aggrandisement.

The fourth statement postulated that Biblical Scriptures informed the preachers that when a believer plants a seed, he or she reaps, and the harvest is bountiful. According to Rivono (O.I. 2022), this was not an overstatement. The proponents of SPD used Scriptures to formulate and perpetuate SPD in the Christian church. He gave a testimony of when he first heard about SPD. The pastor preached a sermon entitled “The Divine Seed”. He used Genesis 22, the story that tells about how God tested

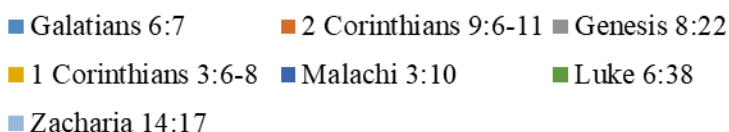
Abraham to offer his only son, and when he overcame the test, he won the blessing of God. The preacher went on to persuade the congregants to give a seed substance that touches their heart, since such a substance will also touch the heart of God. This made the congregants flock in large numbers, bringing forth their seed offering. Rivono (O.I. 2022) believed that preachers used Biblical Scriptures to convince their members. The preacher prepared sermons on the planting of a 'seed' and quoted Scriptures to support their sermon. Like in his case, they were made to believe that;

God's message comes with a requirement, as it happened with Abraham, thus, it applies to the believers today. Abraham was asked by God to offer

his only child, Isaac, as a sacrifice. Though God substituted a ram for Isaac, Abraham's obedience made him the father of many descendants. Therefore, they were urged to act in obedience to the word of God.

This meant that the SPD was an anecdotal statement derived and formulated from the Scriptures. To trace the Scriptures used to 'coin' it, respondents were asked to identify them. They identified Malachi 3:10, Luke 6:38, 1 Corinthians 3:6-8, 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, Genesis 8:22, Galatians 6:7, and Zachariah 14:17. Their frequencies were computed into percentages and were presented on a pie chart as shown in Figure 1.

### Scriptures used to Coin DSP



**Figure 1: Responses in Respect to the main Scriptures used in Coining SPD**

Those who identified Malachi 3:10 as one of the Scriptures used to coin SPD were 45%. While 23% identified Galatians 6:7, 11% identified Luke 6:38, 9% identified 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, 8% identified

Genesis 8:22, 3% identified 1 Corinthians 3:6-8, and 1% identified Zechariah 14:17. The majority of the respondents identified Malachi 3:10 as the main Scripture used to coin SPD. However, all the

aforementioned Scriptures were discussed in detail. This helped to establish how SPD was coined, since it was not directly mentioned in the Bible, like we have tithes and other forms of giving, such as thanksgiving offerings. The researcher compiled the primary information collected and used it to explain how the Scriptures were used to come up with the word “Doctrine of Seed Planting”.

Malachi 3:10b says, "Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so many blessings that you will not have room enough for it". In this Scripture, it is God who is saying 'Test me', and the preacher comes in and says, with your 'seed' and God will open the 'floodgates of heaven' to pour so many blessings until there is no room enough for it. From the Scripture, the element of God causing multiplication comes in. But this is after a believer has dared to test God with a substance, which in this case is a 'seed offering'

Galatians 6:7 indicates that “God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows”. The word sow is a synonym for 'plant, and to 'reap' means to 'harvest. In our natural setup, it is a 'seed' that is sown or planted. After sowing or planting, it is a truism that the type of seed sown brings forth the harvest of its kind. Connecting this to the general meaning of SPD, the advocates preached that 'God is aware', He is omniscient, otherwise no one should be deceived; the floodgates will be opened according to the type and the quantity or amount that is brought forth and planted.

Luke 6:38 further buttresses the foundation of the formulation of the SPD concept. The Scripture highlights, "Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use, it will be measured to you". The two ideas again come up. When one gives, a lot is given back. This depends on the type given. This is connected to the type of seed planted and the ability to reproduce in multiples.

The Book of 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 denoted a direct theme of SPD. The subsection is entitled 'sowing generously'. It denotes the idea of planting the 'seed',

the amount planted, the ability of God to bless and make rich; it says that.

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.... now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest... You will be made rich in every way (NIV).

Again, 'seed' was used in this Scripture to imply the reciprocity of multiplication. The text also pointed to God, who can increase the amount of seed and get a large harvest. This is a promise of becoming rich in every way. Therefore, the believers are taught to plant a seed, and they will be blessed and will be rich in every way. Hence, the coinage of “the doctrine of Seed Planting” is inferred in the Scriptures. To signify its continuity, Genesis 8:22 is used in support of the doctrine that “as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest time... will never cease”. This implies, upon this revelation, SPD is deemed to continue.

Zachariah 14:17 was used to caution the congregants. It says that, “If any of the people of the earth do not go to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain”. The congregants are warned against stopping to go to worship, and worship is done with a substance. Those who fail to bring their substance, God will close the heavens for rain to stop in their lives. The symbolic meaning of this text illustrates God stopping His blessings from reaching those who fail to go to worship Him, especially with their seed.

1 Corinthians 3:6-8 contains the concept of rain and the potential of God to water and grow, which is inferred in the SPD. It pointed out that, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour". Though the text referred to the preaching of Saint Paul and Saint Apollos, the preachers use it in connection with SPD. When believers plant a seed, they are taught not to look up to the preacher for the blessings. Blessings come from God, who waters and makes things grow. This enhances patience to wait until God makes the

‘seed to grow and multiply’ without blaming the preacher.

The analysis from all these Scriptures resonates with the nature of SPD as opined by Mwongera et al. (2023). They argued that the SPD embodied the nature of causing blessings, having a multiplication effect, practised by believers with strong faith and patience. The seed requires fertile soil to grow, and it is an endless practice. It is within this premise that the preachers implored their followers to plant a seed in their movement, and God’s blessings would follow them. The SPD has since gained roots in the modern church in Kenya. It is no longer in NCMs only but in other denominations: The main line, Pentecostal and the African Independent churches (Mwongera, et al., 2023).

In summary, the study explored the theological and historical development of the SPD within NCMs in Kenya, particularly tracing its transition from traditional tithing practices. The findings revealed that the early church had no significant doctrinal gap regarding giving because tithing was primarily understood as a form of service and obligation to the church. However, beginning in the 1990s, the rise of PG created fertile ground for the introduction of SPD. The doctrine was coined as a result of what preachers claimed was divine revelation, emphasising that those who planted financial seeds in the church would receive divine blessings. This shift was attributed to spiritual discernment and wisdom, allegedly granted by God to church leaders.

SPD’s appeal was further reinforced through biblical imagery, drawing on agrarian metaphors similar to Jesus’ teaching style, where religious truths were conveyed through parables and farming analogies. These metaphors gave SPD theological credibility and cultural relevance. The study also found that preachers were motivated by the need to raise church funds, while believers gave in expectation of

material and spiritual blessings. The SPD functioned as both a fundraising tool and a promise-based theology of giving. The key Scripture that supported the coinage of the doctrine was Malachi 3:10, Galatians 6:7, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, Genesis 8:22, Luke 6:38 and Zachariah 14:17. These verses were interpreted to reinforce the principle of sowing and reaping, legitimising the transactional theology embedded in SPD.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** While SPD is often presented by preachers as a biblically grounded principle, this study concludes that it is, in essence, a human invention, a doctrinal construct shaped more by contemporary socio-economic realities and institutional interests than by sound exegetical theology. The selective use of Scripture to validate SPD reflects a pattern of contextual reinterpretation rather than faithful adherence to the original intent. Though rooted in scriptural language, the doctrine departs from traditional Christian teachings on giving by emphasising transactional faith, personal prosperity and material reward. As such, SPD emerges not as a timeless biblical truth but as a modern theological innovation tailored to appeal to the needs, hopes, and challenges of believers in a rapidly changing spiritual and economic landscape, particularly within Kenya. This underscores the critical need for theological discernment and biblical literacy among believers and religious leaders alike.

**Recommendation:** The SPD ought to be understood as a teaching by the clergy calling for their members to enrich them and not vice versa. The preaching is an act of injustice to the needy believers who approach the church as a place of help, but it turns out to be a den of robbers. The government and other organisations are justified in bringing in the proposals on regulating the religious bodies in Kenya without infringing on the right to freedom of worship.

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